

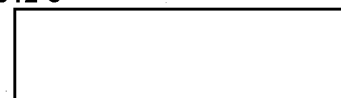
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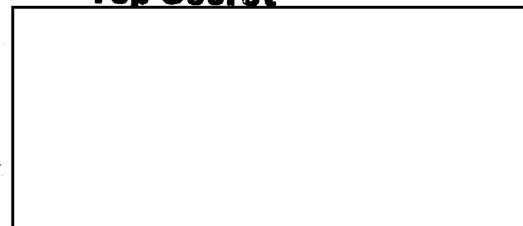
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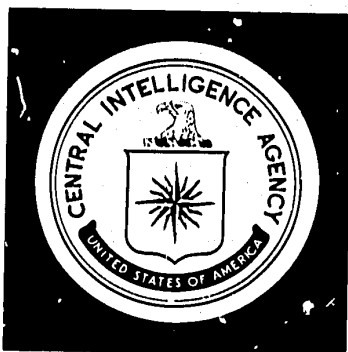
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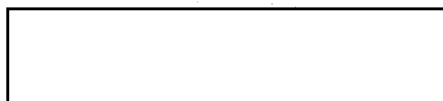
Intelligence Memorandum

Kremlin Politics: The Road to the Summit



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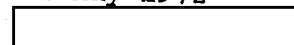
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
26 May 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Kremlin Politics: The Road to the Summit

World events brought leadership politics in the Soviet Union to a head last week and, as is rare, produced an immediate, visible outcome. Brezhnev at a minimum gained some room to maneuver in his pursuit of detente with the West and probably strengthened his personal position in the process. Politburo member Shelest, the Ukrainian party boss who had come to represent opposition to Brezhnev's leadership and to the policy of detente, suffered an important setback. Brezhnev, in the two weeks before the summit, was able to maintain the upper hand in the Kremlin and to seize the opportunity offered by events to bring to fruition a move he began against his opponents last year.

The course of events demonstrated, however, the sensitivity of Brezhnev's position to foreign developments, the reality and strength of the opposition forces, and Brezhnev's defensiveness in these circumstances. His triumph was built on alliances with other elements, both the conservative military point of view represented by Defense Minister Grechko and the political forces represented by Suslov. As a result, Brezhnev is probably to some extent beholden to both of these elements.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates.

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Vietnam: No Decision

1. The Soviet leaders first responded to President Nixon's Vietnam statement of 8 May by doing no more than to keep preparations for the summit in train and to leave their options open.

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2. The Soviet statement on Vietnam issued on 11 May temporized. It committed Moscow to no course of action, but left the impression that action might be expected later if the crisis persisted. Foreign Trade Minister Patolichev was received by President Nixon the same day and responded to newsmen's questions about whether the summit was still on with, "Was there any doubt?" Defense Minister Grechko had left for Syria and Egypt on 10 May. Politburo member Voronov left on 11 May with a Supreme Soviet delegation for Warsaw. Meanwhile, the first moves were made for a show of naval force in the Tonkin Gulf.

3. The business-as-usual facade evidently masked considerable indecision and debate in Moscow on how to proceed. An apparent reversal of the Soviet position on accepting a Bundestag resolution on the Soviet - West German treaty on 9 May had resulted in the postponement by a week of the Bundestag vote, in spite of Soviet Ambassador Falin's attempts in Bonn to correct the situation on 10 May. Falin later claimed that his "mistake" on 9 May had been caused by "confusion in Moscow engendered by the Vietnam crisis." On 10 May, Shelepin informed the Norwegian Trade Union Federation that he was postponing his visit to Norway, scheduled for 15-20 May, because of "unforeseen circumstances." In the past Shelepin has been uneasy at being away from Moscow at times of critical international developments.

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4. The difficulty of Brezhnev's position was plain. Vietnam developments confronted him with a dilemma: how to proceed with the summit while maintaining the Soviet Union's image as defender of its allies and the interests of international Communism. He was the more uncomfortable because, at the same moment, the West German treaties were in jeopardy. Brezhnev's prestige was riding on these treaties to an even greater degree than the summit; the treaties had been a more evident focus of discontent among conservatives such as Shelest.

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German Treaties Break the Jam?

5. The misgivings about detente which had simmered all along in the leadership could only have intensified sharply following President Nixon's speech on 8 May. The evidence suggests that a showdown of some sort within the leadership must have threatened, or come to a head, by 15 May. The outcome was a decision on Brezhnev's part to reaffirm the commitment to hold the summit and to call the central committee into session beforehand to endorse Brezhnev's negotiating stance. This victory for the detente forces doubtless paved the way for Shelest's demotion. The significance of 15 May is suggested by the fact that on that day, after a month-long hiatus in press commentary on the summit, Pravda printed brief TASS announcements of US preparations for the trip. Lead articles in Izvestia on 16 May and Pravda on 17 May explained and justified Moscow's policy of peaceful coexistence, its devotion to finding political solutions to international crises, and the importance it attached to developing relations with the US.

6. The decision was probably taken on or about 15 May to call a central committee plenum for 19 May. Soviet Ambassador to Romania and central

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[redacted]

committee member Drozdenko returned from vacation in the USSR to his post in Bucharest shortly before 14 May, [redacted]

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[redacted] Drozdenko went back to Moscow on Thursday, 18 May.

7. Although these circumstances suggest that the key decisions were made about the 15th, the activities of the leaders during this period do not suggest that a formal politburo meeting was held. The fact that summit preparations were never halted perhaps means that Brezhnev arranged to keep them going, with concomitant press treatment, in informal consultation with his colleagues in Moscow. Arrangements for the plenum might have been handled in a similar fashion.

8. Meanwhile, on 15 May the executive committee of the opposition Christian Democrats in West Germany voted to support the all-Bundestag resolution. This action, despite some backing and filling in Bonn on the 16th, cleared the way for the Bundestag to pass the Eastern treaties on 17 May. Passage of the treaties could not but bolster Brezhnev's position. It meant that the best moment for an all-out challenge of Brezhnev had passed. The Soviet leader may well have seized the opportunity provided to confirm the summit schedule and to reinforce his own position.

9. Politburo members resident in Moscow and those from out of town appeared at an anniversary celebration for the Pioneers on Thursday, 18 May, the usual day for politburo meetings. The only members missing were Voronov, still in Warsaw, and KGB chief Andropov. [redacted]

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[redacted] Final agreement was presumably reached by this group concerning the course of the central committee plenum the next day. The plenum heard a report by Brezhnev on the international situation. It expressed full approval and endorsement of its contents and the actions of the politburo in carrying out the Soviet "peace program." The plenum named Boris Ponomarev a candidate member of the politburo. He is a long-time party secretary

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[REDACTED]

and chief of the central committee's international department that helps form foreign policy and handles relations with Communist parties outside the Soviet bloc. The plenum also approved the appointment, announced 21 May, of Ukrainian first secretary Shelest to the far less important post of USSR deputy premier. Only four days later Shelest's demotion was completed when Ukrainian Premier Shcherbitsky was named to replace Shelest in Kiev.

10. Brezhnev had a fresh mandate on the summit from his fellow politburo members and the central committee. He also was able to deliver a blow against his most outspoken critic on domestic and foreign policy. Appearances suggest that throughout this period he maintained the upper hand in Moscow and kept just far enough ahead of his critics to prevent his hand from being forced.

Brezhnev: Protective Reaction

11. Although Brezhnev was able to engineer a favorable denouement to this pre-summit drama, many elements of the story illustrate the reactive nature of his actions. His position had become sensitive to events in other parts of the world, and it appeared that for a time he could only manage to delay decisions. His dependency on the course of events abroad, of course, was a consequence of a lack of full support at home.

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[REDACTED] The record does not show just when and how the pressures to take another course made themselves felt, but clearly they did. Wavering on how to handle the Bundestag resolution on 9 May and the subsequent decision not to acknowledge it in writing, probably relayed to the Germans on 18 May, reflect conservative pressures and divided counsels. The strained justifications for the summit that have been appearing in the press and the doubting attitude expressed by Soviet audiences at public lectures indicate a vast reservoir of skepticism about detente policies.

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12. The convening of the plenum reflected Brezhnev's concern to protect his flanks. The November 1971 plenum had set the course for the summit, and another meeting was not required for this purpose. Plenums are normally convened after important occasions to hear and approve the leadership's interpretation of their outcome, although Brezhnev has shown a desire in the past to pin down collective endorsement of policies, particularly on touchy topics such as Czechoslovakia in 1968. The list of speakers on Brezhnev's report of 19 May shows extraordinary care in selection. The list was stacked with Brezhnev supporters, such as Armenian party boss Aliyev, and political non-entities, such as the presidents of the Ukrainian and Kazakh science academies. Normally, Shelest and other important regional leaders would have spoken, as they did at the November plenum. And, finally, for a leadership that has always practiced the belief that the appearance of unity is a vital necessity, the demotion of Shelest on the eve of the President's visit was out of place. It suggests the degree to which Brezhnev felt the pressure of his critics and the need to use the opportunity to undercut them.

13. In replacing Shelest with Shcherbitsky, Brezhnev brings to culmination a process he started at the 24th party congress in the spring of last year. Then, he succeeded in having his protege Shcherbitsky raised from candidate to full membership on the politburo. Two Ukrainian leaders sitting as full members on the politburo was a sharp break with precedent and seemed to foreshadow the changes subsequently made. Although Shelest, like others who have been shunted aside, may be able to retain his politburo status for some time, he is now but one of eight other deputy chairmen of the Council of Ministers--none of whom has politburo status--and is outranked on the Council by Chairman Kosygin and two first deputy chairmen who are full members of the politburo.

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Many Winners

14. Brezhnev did not emerge by any means as the sole beneficiary. He seems to have accomplished Shelest's demotion only in alliance with other forces, which may thus have been able to enhance their own standing. In procuring endorsement of his detente policy and in weakening Shelest's position, Brezhnev cultivated his relations with other conservative groups, especially as represented by Grechko.

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15. Another winner may be Suslov, senior party ideologist and foreign affairs expert. Ponomarev is probably Suslov's protege. Both of them reportedly opposed the invasion of Czechoslovakia, strongly pushed by Shelest, because of the opposition they knew it would arouse among other Communist parties. Suslov helped provide the ideological justification for the new opening to West Germany in early 1969. Thus, Ponomarev's promotion, although it would seem to bolster the commitment to detente, does not add to Brezhnev's personal strength. In fact, over the years Suslov has served as a principal independent power broker on the politburo and a defender of its collective features.

16. Finally, it should be noted that the policy of detente, reconfirmed at the plenum, was espoused by Kosygin long before Brezhnev took it over, and detente certainly continues to receive his support. Reports and comments passed to the West late last week about the essentially troika nature of the Soviet side of the summit reflect sensitivity to the positions of Kosygin and President Podgorny.

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